

Message Text

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FOR SEC VANCE AND ADMIN GILLIGAN FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP
SUBJ: AMBASSADOR'S ROLE IN DEALING WITH PRESSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS
POPULATION GROWTH AND ADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION

REF: (A) STATE 201285, (B) STATE 107370

1. SUMMARY. CURRENTLY, MAURITANIA'S GROWING POPULATION VS FOOD PRODUCTION PROBLEM IS MORE A FUNCTION OF DRAMATIC CHANGES IN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION THAN OF NET INCREASE PER SE. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM WILL CHANGE AS MODERN HEALTH CARE REDUCES THE HIGH DEATH RATE. THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA (GIRM) HAS NO POPULATION POLICY YET, BUT THE TIME SEEMS AT HAND FOR SUCH A POLICY, AND USG COULD BE INSTRUMENTAL IN INFLUENCING A DECISION IN THAT DIRECTION AND IN DESIGNING A PROGRAM.

2. THE, PRE-JULY 10-COUP, TOP LEADERSHLQ OF MAURITANIA, A PARADIGM OF FOOD DEFICIT COUNTRIES, DEMONSTRATED AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR THIRD WORLD CO-OPERATION IN THE AREAS DISCUSSED IN REFTEL B. ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION, FORMER PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH SHARED WITH ME AND VISITING AMERICAN OFFICIALS HIS CONCERN ABOUT RAPID URBANIZATION, RESULTING FROM NINE YEARS OF VIRTUALLY UNINTERRUPTED DROUGHT TOGETHER WITH ALMOST THREES YEARS OF THE POLI-
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SARIO THREAT AND THE EFFECT THIS WAS HAVING ON MAURITANIA'S ABILITY TO FEED ITS POPULATION. THIS IS BUT A SLIGHT LOCAL VARIATION TO THE MORE GENERAL THEME OF INCREASED POPULATION GROWTH OUTRUNNING THE GRD'S CAPABILITY TO PRODUCE FOOD. THE SUBJECT HAS NOT COME UP WITH THE NEW LEADERSHIP, BUT THERE IS EVERY EVIDENCE THAT IT IS SEIZED OF THE PROBLEM.

3. DURING THE PAST FOUR YEARS, AT LEAST, THERE HAS BEEN CONTINUAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN MISSION PERSONNEL AND SENIOR GIRM OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRIES OF HEALTH, PLANNING AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS. THE GIRM HAS NO OFFICIAL POLICY ON FAMILY PLANNING. IT IS NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST. IT REGULARLY SENDS REPRESENTATIVES TO CONFERENCES ON THE SUBJECT. IT PROVIDES FAMILY PLANNING ADVICE AND IN SOME CASES THE MEANS, BUT ONLY ON A CASE BY CASE MEDICAL BASIS; THAT IS TO PROMOTE HEALTH RATHER THAN LIMIT SIZE OF FAMILIES PER SE.

4. ALTHOUGH MAURITANIA'S BIRTH RATE OF 44.4 PER THOUSAND IS HIGH COMPARED TO THE U.S. FIGURE OF 9 PER THOUSAND IT IS LOWER THAN THE WEST AFRICAN AVERAGE OF 49 PER THOUSAND. ITS HIGH DEATH RATE OF 24 PER

THOUSAND, EXCEEDED IN WEST AFRICA ONLY BY MALI AND UPPER VOLTA REDUCES ITS NET RATE OF POPULATION INCREASE TO 2.1 PERCENT. THIS COMPARES WITH THE WEST AFRICAN AVERAGE OF 2.7 PER CENT. IN SOME PARTS OF LATIN AMERICAN AND ASIA THE AVERAGES GO AS HIGH AS 3 PERCENT AND OVER.

5. HENCE THE PROBLEM HERE RELATES MORE TO A REDISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION THAN TO ITS NET INCREASE. THE LAST CENSUS, TAKEN IN JANUARY 1977, INDICATED A TOTAL POPULATION OF 1,350,000. THE MOST REVEALING FINDING TO COME OUT OF THE SURVEY WAS THE COMPLETE REVERSAL OF THE 1965 RATIO BETWEEN NOMADS AND SEDENTARIES. 65 PER CENT NOMADS 35 PERCENT SEDENTARIES IN 1965 VERSUS 32 PER CENT NOMAD AND 68 PERCENT SEDENTARY IN 1977. MAJOR FACTORS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WERE THOUGHT TO BE THE DROUGHT AND, MORE RECENTLY THE WAR, BUT OTHER FACTORS NAMED WERE:

- PENETRATION OF NEW LIVING CUSTOMS
- CREATION OF A TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE
- INDUSTRIALIZATION OF CERTAIN CITIES
- INCREASING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH.

6. THE 1965 SEDENTARY POPULATION WAS A NET PRODUCER OF FOOD: I.E., THESE PEOPLE REMAINED IN PLACE, BUT THEIR PLACE WAS ARABLE FARM LAND IN THE SENEGAL RIVER BASIN. THERE WERE FEW CITIES. UNFORTUNATELY, THE WORD SEDENTARY NOW IS ALMOST A SYNONYM FOR URBANIZED. NOUAKCHOTT ITSELF IS THE MOST DRAMATIC EXAMPLE OF THIS PHENOMENON. A VILLAGE OF LESS THAN 1,000 INHABITANTS IN THE EARLY 1960'S, PREVIOUS PROJECTION ENVISIONED A CAPTIAL OF NO MORE THAN 16,000 INHABITANTS, BY 1977. THE 1977 CENSUS SHOWED 135,000 INHABITANTS, I.E., EIGHT AND ONE HALF TIMES LARGER THAN PREDICTED, CONSTITUTING ONE TENTH OF MAURITANIA'S POPULATION AND STILL GROWING. SOME GIRM OFFICIALS AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS FEEL THAT THE POPULATION HAS ALREADY EXCEEDED 20: 000. OTHER URBAN CENTERS ARE EXPERIENCING SIMILAR ALBEIT LESS STARTLING GROWTH.

7. CONCLUSION: A SOCIETY IN WHICH POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES ARE STILL COMMON, WHERE DIVORCE IS SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE, WHERE CONSERVATIVE MOORISH/ISLAMIC RELUCTANCE TO DISCUSS INTIMATE MATTERS PREVAILS, DOES NOT LEND ITSELF READILY TO AN ORGANIZED PROGRAM OF INSTRUCTION IN BIRTHCONTROL TECHNIQUES OF THE CONVENTIONAL VARIETY. HAVING SAID THIS, WE KNOW, FIRSTHAND, THAT THERE IS AN INCREASING AWARENESS AMONG THE RECENTLY URBANIZED OF THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING FEWER MOUTH'S TO FEED, AND FEWER CHILDREN TO EDUCATE. IT WOULD SEEM TO US THO (CONTRARY TO THE LEAD PHRASE OF PARA 5 OF STATE 107370) THE NEW GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELCOME A USAID INTRODUCED POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAM NOT AS A QUID PRO QUO FOR ECONOMIC/DEVELOPMENTAL ASSISTANCE BUT AS A SUPPLEMENTAL THERETO. KRYZA

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